

## **Taxi Forum 14 June 2024 at the Civic Centre, Addlestone at 11am**

The forum was attended by 4 drivers, one retired driver, one operator and Councillor M Harnden (Chair of the Regulatory Committee) who were welcomed to the forum by Mrs Kelly Dutfield (KD), the new Senior Licensing Officer. Mrs Jill Tyne (JT), Taxi Licensing Officer and Miss Clare Pinnock (taking notes) were also in attendance.

### **1. Staff changes in the Licensing Team**

KD has been in post since 1 April following Robert Smith's retirement, she has been in Local Government for 20 years with an environmental health background. JT was the borough's Taxi Licensing Officer with many years of experience. KD was looking forward to working with all members of the trade over the coming months. Mrs Nicola Clarke was also part of the team, on hand to assist with any queries and administration of taxi licensing. Drivers were reminded that they could always use the licensing email or telephone plus refer to website for information.

### **2. VAT treatment of private hire vehicles consultation**

KD highlighted that the government had published a public consultation on the potential tax impacts of recent High Court judgments on transport legislation. The consultation invited views on potential government interventions that could help to mitigate any undue adverse effects on the PHV sector and its passengers.

Drivers were informed that further information was available at:

[www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-vat-treatment-of-private-hire-vehicles](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-vat-treatment-of-private-hire-vehicles) and that responses should be sent by 8 August 2024. Drivers were encouraged to respond.

### **3. Hackney Carriage Fare increase**

Forum attendees were reminded that following the consultation on the proposed new tariff for Runnymede meters, the changes came into effect from Monday 8 April 2024. Those who had submitted calibration certificates were thanked and drivers with meters were reminded to submit calibrations if not done so already.

### **4. Enforcement Operation**

KD reported on the multi agency enforcement at Runnymede Pleasure grounds on 5 June which was organised by JT. It was a successful event involving colleagues from Spelthorne and Surrey Heath Borough Councils plus enforcement officers from TFL and the Police traffic unit.

KD reported that 50 vehicles (mainly a variety of taxis) had been stopped. Most problems were TFL vehicles. 2 drivers were issued with Traffic Offence Reports for using their mobile phones. Of the 50 vehicles stopped, 3 were Runnymede vehicles over course of 4 hours – 1 vehicle needed cleaning, which was a positive result overall.

JT reported that the Sussex commercial vehicle unit Officer was impressed with the quality of the vehicles and compliance in Surrey compared with Sussex where more offences are found.

It was hoped to conduct similar operations in the future.

## **5. Railway station hackney carriage ranks**

The forum was reminded that following on from the February newsletter, The Regulatory Committee considered a report regarding the station rank contract with South Western Railways on 13 March 2024. It was re-iterated that SWR would take back the control, supervision and contract arrangements for the station ranks from 1 January 2025.

The Council had entered a contract for hire of the ranks for this year until 17<sup>th</sup> August 2024 and would, as usual, recoup the cost through HC vehicle fees in 2025.

With the current contract until 17<sup>th</sup> August, drivers were asked would they want to pay from 18<sup>th</sup> August – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, or should RBC cease the remaining months of the contract?

RBC would no longer be providing ANPR details for HC drivers at Egham Station from January 2025. At the moment there was a 'white list' provided that meant drivers didn't get a ticket, but they would after 1 January if they stayed on the rank for more than 10 minutes. Therefore, drivers would need to liaise directly with SWR with regard to the future individual arrangements with the company.

Feedback was that not many drivers used the ranks and were reminded that they would not be paying anything from 1 January 2025 if not using the ranks. It was remarked that there were too many taxi firms operating in Egham around the stations, therefore too much competition.

JT considered that on the whole, drivers had been lucky over the years compared with drivers in other areas that had always had to pay more through individual arrangements. RBC's arrangement was unusual but it was not known who the other LA's are that had that arrangement.

It was thought that SWR would monitor usage from 1 January using ANPR. KD was hoping to get a representative from SWR along to the next forum as RBC won't be involved and it would be helpful to know what the future charging arrangements would be. It was clarified that SWR could not give licences to Uber or vehicles not licensed in RBC.

## **6. Surrender of a Licence**

KR reminded the forum that if a driver no longer wished to use their licence, they had to allow it to expire at the end of its term. Neither the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 nor the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022 made any provision for the surrender of a driver's licence. This was to prevent drivers trying to surrender their licence instead of facing the prospect of a revocation or suspension, in order to avoid an NR3S entry.

## 7. Assistance Dogs

It was noted that taxis and the door-to-door service provided an important mode of transport for people with disabilities. Therefore it was important that disabled people who use guide and other assistance dogs were confident they could hire a taxi, which would carry them and their dog at no extra charge. The forum was reminded that the only grounds for any driver to decline to carry an assistance dog was through the approved medical exemption process.

KD set out the legal duties placed on taxi and PHV drivers/operators whereby any disabled person had specific rights and protections to be transported, and should receive assistance when using a taxi or PHV, without being charged extra. Drivers had to provide reasonable adjustments for passengers with a disability. For example;

- Ensuring that booking apps are accessible (with an option to state whether the customer has any access requirements);
- Meeting a passenger with sight loss at their front door or other collection point, letting them know that you have arrived (rather than expecting them to find you) and introducing yourself (use the customer's name, if known);
- Assisting the passenger to safely enter/exit the vehicle and guiding them to a safe location/destination point before departing;
- Asking where the assistance dog owner would prefer their dog to be accommodated.

Research from the Dog Trust was noted which reported that over 80% of guide dog owners had experienced an access refusal, and 63% had been refused access to a taxi or PHV in the 12-month period prior to their survey. This experience affected the confidence of disabled people getting access to a vehicle. Drivers were advised to be aware of legal requirements and there would be a zero tolerance approach in RBC.

The question of the requirement of restraining assistance dogs was discussed.

JT said that dogs had to be safely tethered and they shouldn't be on the front seat for example. It was noted that most dogs were trained to sit in the footwell, and they couldn't be left unrestrained because it affected the safety of the animal and other car users, including the driver. It was clarified that enforcement wasn't a police matter.

One of the drivers who owned a dog referred to short leads like a seat belt attachment being available to clip and secure the dog so it didn't move too much.

It was agreed that not many drivers had a proper carry crate and they could be expensive.

KD said they would look into the advice for the secure transport of dogs and assistance dogs and add it to the forum notes.

The Highway Code says; *"When in a vehicle make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. A seat belt harness, pet carrier, dog cage or dog guard are ways of restraining animals in cars"*.

The important point is that any dog should not distract the driver - all assistance dogs are trained to lie quietly by their owners' feet. You should allow the dog to remain under the physical control of the owner at all times.

If the passenger is an assistance dog owner, ask them if they would like their dog in the footwell next to them or in the back of the vehicle if suitable (for example if the vehicle is an estate car or hatchback with removable parcel shelf).

If the passenger wants their dog in the rear footwell, you may need to pull the front passenger seat forwards to increase space in the footwell. If the dog travels with its owner in the front foot well, do not disengage the passenger airbag.

Further information can be found [online](#).

#### **8. AOB:**

Those present thought that the Civic Centre offered a better, more accessible venue for the drivers. However, the Addlestone location could dissuade Egham based drivers or other attendees using public transport. However, there was a cost in hiring the Hythe which had to be passed on.

There being no other business raised, it was confirmed that the next forum (with biscuits) would be held in October 2024, date and location to be confirmed and that Forum notes were available on the RBC website.

Everyone was thanked for their attendance.

The forum finished at 11.28am.